

Message Text

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ACTION PM-04

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8677

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AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 12007

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, CO

SUBJECT: FUTURE OF MILITARY GROUPS

REF: (A) STATE 292128; (B) BOGOTA 10303; (C) BOGOTA 4988

1. AS INDICATED REFTTEL B, HIGHEST LEVELS OF COLOMBIAN DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT HAVE EXPRESSED STRONGEST PREFERENCE FOR CONTINUATION OF MILGROUP IN COLOMBIA OF STRUCTURE AND SIZE ESSENTIALLY COMPARABLE TO THAT THEY NOW HAVE. WE USE "THAT THEY NOW HAVE" ADVISEDLY; THEY CONSIDER THAT MILGROUP IS IN FACT "THEIRS", TREATING AND USING IT AS A CO-LOCATED AND INTEGRAL PART OF THEIR OWN GENERAL STAFF. IN THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE PROBLEM, THEN, THE USG IS TALKING ABOUT SHARPLY REDUCING OR ELIMINATING WHAT THEY VIEW AS A KEY ELEMENT OF THEIR GENERAL STAFF, ALL WITHOUT THE CONSULTATION AND MUTUAL ACCORD CALLED FOR IN OUR BILATERAL MILITARY MISSION AGREEMENT OF APRIL 1975. ALL INDICATIONS WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE COLOMBIANS ARE THAT THEY ARE QUITE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEM OF AECA, AND DO NOT REPEAT NOT WANT ANY SUDDEN RADICAL

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CHANGES.

2. FOR THESE REASONS, AND TO ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF ENOUGH U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL TO PROVIDE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECTED SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR COLOMBIA, PARTICULARLY CONSIDERING THE RECENT RENEWAL OF FMS CREDIT FOR COLOMBIA AFTER A THREE-YEAR LAPSE, THE BASIC POSITION OF POST REMAINS AS EXPRESSED IN REFTEL B; I.E., A MILGROUP STAFFING LEVEL OF EIGHTEEN FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS; AND AN ASSUMED PHASED REDUCTION TO LOWER LEVELS THEREAFTER.

3. A MORE ACCELERATED REDUCTION OF THE MILGROUP IN COLOMBIA NECESSARILY REMAINS SUBJECT TO A NUMBER OF CAVEATS, SOME DEPENDENT ON UNILATERAL ACTION AND OTHERS ON BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL CONSIDERATIONS. REFTEL A IS NOT EXPLICIT ON WHAT TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE ENVISIONED FOR A RETAINED "MILITARY GROUP," AND IT IS THUS DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE MEANING OF "EFFICIENT OPERATIONS" AGAINST WHICH WE ARE TO ASSESS MINIMUM PERSONNEL NEEDS. REFTEL C DID ADVANCE POSTS'S ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL FOR ADMINISTERING MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD. A REVIEW OF THAT PROPOSAL AND ITS CAVEATS SHOULD BE USEFUL, PARTICULARLY SINCE SOME STEPS IN THE DIRECTION OF THAT ALTERNATIVE HAVE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN, AS A FUNCTION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICES OF DEFENSE COOPERATION (ODC) ELSEWHERE.

4. WE SUGGESTED DOING AWAY WITH THE TRADITIONAL MILGROUP OF MAAG ORGANIZATION, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ITS INTERNAL ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES AS A FULL-FLEDGED INDEPENDENT MILITARY UNIT. THE ODC CONCEPT, WITH THE IDC AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE EMBASSY RATHER THAN AS A SEPARATE MILITARY COMMAND, APPEARS TO LEND ITSELF TO OUR IDEA. WE THEN ADVISED THAT WE FELT THAT, IF FULLY SUPPORTED ADMINISTRATIVELY BY THE EMBASSY, A LIAISON ELEMENT OF A MINIMUM OF EIGHT RELATIVELY SENIOR OFFICERS, TWO TO WORK WITH EACH HOST MILITARY SERVICE AND TWO TO WORK WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTRY AND JOINT STAFF, COULD PROBABLY ACCOMPLISH SPECIFIED TASKS AND CONSTITUTE A CONTINUED U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE THAT COULD BE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND PALATABLE TO THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY.

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5. HOWEVER, AS STATED IN REF C, THIS CONCEPT WOULD ONLY WORK UNDER THE FOLLOWING FIVE CONDITIONS:

- A. THAT IT BE UNIFORMLY APPLIED IN LATIN AMERICA TO AVOID THE INTERPRETATION THAT SOME COUNTRIES MAY BE RECEIVING SECOND CLASS TREATMENT.
- B. FAST, EFFECTIVE U.S. BACKSTOPPING; E.G. MTT'S , ETS.
- C. TOP QUALITY, SENSITIVE, LANGUAGE QUALIFIED PERSONNEL.
- D. ELIMINATION OF THE CURRENT FLOOD OF ADMINISTRATIVE

REQUIREMENTS WITH WHICH MILGROUPS ARE TAXED.

E. FULL PROMPT CONSULTATION WITH THE COLOMBIANS, WITH ALL POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATION TO THEIR VIEWS ON ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES, THE CONSULTATION HAVING ENHANCED PROSPECTS IF PRESENTED IN THE CONTEXT OF A CONCEPTUAL CHANGE. PARTICULARLY IN A PARALLEL REGIONAL FRAMEWORK, AS OPPOSED TO SIMPLY SEEKING THEIR ACQUIESCENCE IN A FURTHER SHRINKING OF PERSONNEL RESOURCES.

G. FINALLY, THAT IF THESE CONDITIONS CANNOT BE MET, THE CONCEPT WOULD NOT WORK, AND THAT WE MAY AS WELL STAY WITH THE TRADITIONAL MILGROUP PATTERN, STREAMLINED WHERE POSSIBLE.

6. WE FEEL THAT OUR EARLIER PERCEPTIONS, AS AMPLIFIED IN REFTEL C, REMAIN VALID. HOWEVER, THE LIMITED INFORMATION IN OUR POSSESSION INDICATES THAT OUR CAVEATS REMAIN, TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT, TO BE ADDRESSED. PARAGRAPH ONE OF REFTEL A SPEAKS OF RETAINING "MILITARY GROUP" DESIGNATIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR UNIQUE CHARACTER AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES, APPARENTLY IN PLACE OF THE ODC DESIGNATION AND AN UNKNOWN PORTION OF THE ODC CONCEPTS PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED. IN THIS CONNECTION, THE TERM "MILITARY GROUP" HAS NO SPECIAL CACHET IN COLOMBIA, WHERE IT IS IN ONLY UNILATERAL U.S. USAGE. AS NOTED REFTEL C, ANOTHER TERM WOULD BE EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE TO COLOMBIA.) INDICATORS SO FAR ARE THAT UNIFORMITY IN APPLICATION IN THE REGION IS OF LESS CONCERN IN CURRENT WASHINGTON THINKING THAN ARE DIFFERENCES; FOR EXAMPLE, THE POTENTIAL FOR "MORE GENEROUS" TREATMENT OF NATIONS AS DISPARATE AS BRAZIL AND BOLIVIA, NEITHER OF WHICH INCIDENTALLY ENJOYS COLOMBIA'S CONFIDENTIAL

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(AND VENEZUELA'S) UNIQUE DISTINCTION IN SOUTH AMERICA AS FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACIES.

7. IN SUMMARY, IT MAY BE PRACTICAL AND PERHAPS DESIRABLE, TO HAVE A SMALLER SECURITY ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATION IN COLOMBIA, EVENTUALLY. BASED ON THE INFORMATION WE HAVE NOW. HOWEVER, IT IS UNCLEAR HOW WE CAN GET THERE AS SOON AS OCTOBER 1, 1977, EXCEPT AS A FORCED AND UNILATERAL ACTION IGNORING WHAT WE KNOW OF STRONG COLOMBIAN PREFERENCES AND SENSITIVITIES. WE THEREFORE REITERATE OUR VIEW THAT THE PRESENT MILGROUP STRUCTURE AND A MANNING LEVEL OF EIGHTEEN FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, DECLINING THEREAFTER, MAKES MOST SENSE TO U.S. HERE. WE WOULD WELCOME, HOWEVER, A SOMEWHAT FULLER EXPLANATION OF WASHINGTON THINKING AND PLANNING, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO PROJECTED MISSIONS AND

TASKS.
SANCHEZ

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